

EFFECT OF BOMBING ON BREAKING THE WILL OF POLITICAL
LEADERS IN WORLD WAR II AND KOREA *

Every war is unique, and great reservation should be used in assuming that what was effective or not effective under certain circumstances would be similarly effective or not effective at other times.

Germany, World War II

Political leaders fought to the very end in Nazi Germany. Neither bombing nor decisive military defeats broke their will to resist.

The official British Air Force history states that until March 1944, despite the great bomber offensive, "the will of the German people was not broken nor even significantly impaired and the effect on war production was remarkably small." (Volume III, p. 288.) In the last year of the war, the combination of military disasters, effectiveness of Allied bombing, and increasing economic difficulties contributed to rapidly lowering German morale. Even then, as USSBS points out, (p. 16), "under ruthless Nazi control, they (the Germans) showed surprising resistance to the terror and hardships of repeated air attack The power of a police state over its people cannot be underestimated."

United Kingdom, World War II

German air attacks against the United Kingdom caused considerable damage and much suffering for the British during the Battle of Britain in the late summer and early fall of 1940 and as the result of multi-plane raids during the middle war years and of V-weapons which started to strike in the summer of 1944. The political leaders of Great Britain, however, never gave serious consideration to suing for peace in order to bring a halt to destruction and casualties.

Japan, World War II

Bombing made a major contribution to the steady rise of the "peace" party that was successful, despite strong objections by military leaders, in having the Japanese Government accept the Potsdam surrender terms on August 14, 1945.

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The replacement of Tojo by Koiso in July 1944 after the fall of Saipan was the first official recognition that Japanese chances of winning the war were getting smaller. The long-range bombing attack against the Japanese home islands was initiated in November 1944, culminating in early March 1945 in the devastating fire raids against Tokyo, Nagoya, Osake, and Kobe. In April 1945, Koiso was replaced by Suzuki whose delicate mission was to probe for peace.

The fissure within the Japanese Government was widened as one military defeat followed another, as the blockade created steadily increasing economic problems, and as the bombing demonstrated to the Japanese people the drastic deterioration in their situation that the official censorship had hidden. Declining morale, hastened by the air raids, was considered by the conservative peace group a threat to the existing regime and thus encouraged its efforts for an early peace. At the same time, the low state of morale was counted upon by the peace faction as insurance against public support of a coup d'etat by the militarist die-hards. (USSBS, Japanese Morale, p. 5.)

While the majority of the Suzuki Cabinet was committed to peace and willing to accept increasingly harsher terms as the war situation deteriorated, the atomic bombs of August 6 and 9 provided them the opportunity for reaching their objective. Defeat could be blamed on "miraculous" weapons rather than "military leaders."

Not one, but numerous factors, jointly and cumulatively, were responsible for Japan's disaster. Civilian leaders, unlike the military leaders, early recognized the inevitability of defeat. Bombing helped to increase their determination and, finally, the atom bombs provided the chance for carrying out their plan.

Korea, 1950-53

With political control of the Communist side of the Korean war vested, for all practical purposes, first in the Soviet Union and later in Communist China which were not subject to air attack, bombing during the Korean hostilities could, at best, have only an indirect effect on the termination of the war.

The combined power of UN land, sea, and air forces, assisted by diplomatic pressure, brought the Communists to the conference table in July 1951. During the subsequent two years of armistice negotiations,

the ground forces were stalemated and neither air nor sea power proved decisive enough to end the war.

Operation STRANGLE, the air interdiction campaign, failed to live up to its name. Roads, railways, tunnels, bridges, rolling stock, trucks, all were destroyed in large numbers, but sufficient supplies to carry on the war -- while the front remained relatively static -- moved forward, as the enemy showed astonishing ingenuity in repairing communications, constructing bypasses, using night convoys, and employing coolie labor.

No agreement exists on what caused the Communists to conclude an armistice in July 1953. The absence of any trustworthy information on this point makes speculation inevitable. The suggestion of the official USAF history -- that the air pressure campaign of the last year made the war too expensive for the Communists to continue -- is not accepted by most students of the period. The major causes usually cited include the death of Stalin, the mandate given Eisenhower by the 1952 election, the possible use of atomic bombs, and the fact that the advantages to the Communists of a continuous stalemate in the armistice negotiations were disappearing.

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During World War II and Korea bombing constituted an integral and essential factor in terminating hostilities, although it is impossible to assign a quantitative value to the air effort.

Wars not terminated by military defeat and occupation are ended when the ruling group determines that the continuation of hostilities might result in greater loss than profit. In this calculation, the destructive potential of airpower could be decisive.

Calculation is not
made as this
suggests on
strictly material
basis.

MDR

Ed
While this is certainly
to our thinking we
ought to give this
a good hard look.
My glands tell me
this paper is right.
Your experience
probably tells you
the same
Bill

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*This essay is said
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impression in the OASIS
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